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Governor A. B. Cummins at Andersonville

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GOVERNOR A. B. CUMMINS AT ANDERSONVILLE.

During the journey to the Southern Battle-fields in November, 1906, Governor Albert B. Cummins was the principal speaker representing our State, though several other distinguished gentlemen spoke upon occasion as their services were required. It was his proper official duty to receive the monuments from the various commissions, thanking them on behalf of the people of Iowa for the admirable manner in which their important duties had been performed. He then presented them to the agent of the General Government, who represented War Secretary Taft upon the different occasions. To say that he performed this arduous duty to the satisfaction of his auditors, eloquently and in splendid taste, would be but to faintly convey the feelings of his different audiences, especially the old soldier element, which was largely represented on this historic excursion. His crowning effort on these occasions was at Andersonville, where he extemporaneously addressed his auditors from a stand which had been erected among the thousands of monuments to the dead who had given their lives at that place. The Iowa monument was one of the most tasteful among those erected on the battle-fields of the south. As he was concluding his remarks an old soldier was heard to express himself as follows: "I have heard three great historic speeches. One was the first inaugural address of Abraham Lincoln on the 4th of March, 1861; the next was the reply of Andrew Johnson to several attacks made upon him by rebel Senators in the U. S. Senate, and the third one was that of Governor Cummins at Andersonville." It really needs no introduction, for its expressions are so clear and eloquent that they tell their own story. He was listened to with profound attention, and at the close of his address there were few dry eyes in that assemblage. An Iowa Colonel who pondered over the inscriptions on the monument remarked that he had discovered the names of eight men of his command who were there buried. He walked away with streaming eyes, as did scores of others. The Iowa monument is one of great beauty. It is a solid block of Montello porphyry from the little town of that name in Wisconsin. Perhaps one-fourth of the space on the four sides is occupied with a list of the Iowa dead. This monument is surmounted with a statue of a woman, leaning forward in the attitude of weeping. The only criticism we heard upon this monument was that this figure of Iowa had not been cast in bronze. Granite will in a few decades show evidences of great deterioration and this figure will not escape the common fate of such statues. For the time that it will last, however, nothing could be more admirably designed. The day was a sad one from the terrible associations with which the monument and the graves were surrounded. Every one who was fortunate enough to be present and listen to our distinguished Governor, heard an address which has already become historic and will never be forgotten.

Mr. Chairman, Gentlemen of the Andersonville Prison Monument Association, Prisoners of War, Ladies and Gentlemen: Words are meaningless things upon an occasion like this. I think that all understand that, but possibly you do not appreciate as I do at this moment that words are not

only meaningless—inadequate, but they are difficult as well. Mr. Chairman, as you have so well said, but a few hours ago, we dedicated to the immortal renown of our boys who fought at Vicksburg, the memorials which a grateful State has erected to their memory. It was easy to speak as I stood upon that historic spot. It was easy to speak of the wild enthusiasm of the charge and the rushing splendor of the assault, for death seemed to be robbed of its terrors when accompanied with a glory so radiant and so complete. That hour was full of glowing memories. This hour is surcharged with the saddest recollections that can fill the human heart.

It seemed to me this morning that the clouds themselves were in harmony with the emotions that overcome these soldiers of the war and with the ceremonies through which we are passing. They were weeping in sympathy with the loyal people of the State of Iowa, as we stand where her brave sons suffered the extremest test of loyalty to the Union and to the flag. Does it not fill your hearts with a new purpose, my dear friends, does it not fill them with a new adoration for human nature, when you remember that these boys suffered the unparalleled inhumanity of the prison and the infinite cruelties of the stockade rather than to surrender for a single moment their privilege to fight and to die for the Union, and for the sovereignty of the old flag? It seems to me that in all the lessons of history, in all the inspiration of bravery and courage, nothing can surpass the resolution which filled their hearts when, day after day, they saw their comrades go nameless into unknown graves, rather than desert the Union which they had sworn to protect and to preserve. Ah, when I come to review the perils, the hardships, of the war, as I have done in many a patriotic moment, I never dreamed of the emotions which fill, crowd, and overcrowd my soul at this moment. I never knew that such a scene could be presented to the human eye. I have never looked upon anything so pathetic as these long lines of gleaming marble, each telling its story of a patriotic life and a faithful death. We cannot, however, ennoble them. It is for us to leave this beautiful, serene home of the dead, with still higher, with still nobler, with still more enduring resolutions that we of this

generation will exemplify in our lives, will exemplify in our devotion to the flag, the Union, and to humanity, the spirit which animated their faithful hearts. We do not understand the inscrutable mysteries of Providence; but we do know that we are commemorating another vicarious atonement, and it is well that our tears should fall here, consecrating its dear memories. The Republic of the United States had committed a mortal sin, and somewhere, somehow, in the plan of the Almighty, that sin must be expiated; and it was expiated here, when these men laid down their lives for the Union, as my friend the Chairman of the Commission has well said, not inspired and cheered by the music of martial strains, not led on by the shriek and storm of shot and shell, but in the misery and the suffering of cruelty and want. Ah! as I look upon that pathetic memorial, erected by my beloved State, there ring in my ears, through forty years of time, the echoes of the battle hymn of the Republic:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where his grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword,
For God is marching on.

And then, I think of the awful carnage of war. Three hundred and sixty thousand of our boys laid down their lives that we might stand here free citizens of the Republic. Have you ever thought of the wives who had shared the joys and sorrows of these immortal spirits, of the mothers who had borne them, of the maids who had loved them; have you ever attempted to measure the infinite sacrifice that the people of America made, just to see to it that not a single star in the azure field of Old Glory should ever fade away, and that no stain should ever again mar the pure colors of its beautiful folds?

And then, when I think of the scenes we are so sadly recalling, the battle hymn again comes to me:

He hath sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat.
Be swift, my soul, to answer him; be jubilant, my feet,
For his truth is marching on.

And it did march on, until it was crystallized in the glories of a peace which preserved to every citizen of the Republic the high dignities and the high privileges of independent manhood.

Mr. Chairman, speaking on behalf of the State of Iowa, speaking on behalf of all her people, I congratulate you most cordially upon the beauty of the work that you have done. There (pointing to the monument) kneels Iowa, weeping, suffering, grieving for the sons she lost. She rests upon a column of enduring granite, that so long as time shall last will speak to generations yet to come, not only of the fortitude and the courage of these boys who lie buried here and who endured over there (pointing to the stockade) but will make them know that republics are not ungrateful. It will no longer be said that the people of a free country do not fondly remember those who have died that truth might live.

I congratulate you upon the felicity of the design and upon the fidelity with which your Commission has performed its work, and speaking again for the people whom you have so well represented, I thank you for this offering laid upon the altar of our patriotism.

And now, General Carman, representing the Government of the United States, even as our Commission has placed this testimonial in my hands, I deliver it into yours, knowing that it passes into the keeping of a Government whose flag flies for all her citizens, without respect to condition in life, whether they be high or low, rich or poor, white or black. It flies for them all, and until freemen shall have lost the spirit that has animated the lovers of liberty in all the ages of the past, it will stream over this mansion of eternal rest, protecting and preserving this monument erected by the State of Iowa in loving memory of her beloved children who died in Andersonville.

Territory of Iowa }
Cass County } The United States of America to
the Sheriff of said County Greeting
Do hereby command you to take the body of
James F. Turner and him have forthwith before
the District Court of the County of said to answer
a charge preferred against him by the Grand
Jury of said County at the present term of this
Court for the crime of disturbing the dead
human body not at your peril but of this
writ make legal service and due return
of your doings according to law
Witness the Hon Charles Mason Judge
of our said Court under the Seal of
said Court this 15th day of April
AD 1840
George B. Haytine Clerk DC

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